REMARKS

This is a full and timely response to the outstanding non-final Office Action mailed April 16, 2004. Upon entry of the amendments in this response, claims 1 - 32 remain pending. In particular, Applicant has amended claims 6, 16 and 27. Reconsideration and allowance of the application and presently pending claims are respectfully requested.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C 103(a)

The Office Action indicates that claims 1-32 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C 103(a) as being unpatentable over Takahashi et al. (U.S. Patent 6,618,692) in view of Hu et al. (U.S. Patent 6,314,379). Applicant respectfully traverses the rejections.

Turning first to Takahashi, Applicant respectfully asserts that Takahashi does not teach or reasonably suggest the features/limitations attributed in the Office Action to Takahashi. Specifically, Takahashi fails to disclose, suggest, or teach the holding of the goods at the first process stage by the service provider and the release of the goods for further operations by the service provider after the confirmation message is received.

For example, Col. 11, lines 46-51 of the Takahashi patent discloses:

> Equipment control means 215 stores a processing procedure comprising the steps of checking the status (Enabled or Disabled) of the wafer processors 202-1 to 202-4 while an automatic operation is in progress, stopping a wafer processor if it is disabled, and continuing the automatic operation using the other available wafer processor.

Thus, Takahashi explains the general concept of a multi-processor environment in parallel processing, wherein the other wafer processors can take over to perform the automatic operation if any are disabled. Additionally, col. 21, lines 20-23 of the Takahashi patent discloses, "The user goes to the next step according to the result. When the user requires a diagnosis of a next level, the diagnosis system charges the user according to the requested level and starts the diagnostic software of that level (1822)." Thus, the user can decide to have a further diagnosis ("go to the next step") if the user feels that there are still problems or malfunctions in the diagnosed equipment. Since no relation or communication between the equipment tools is disclosed in the Takahashi patent, Takahashi concerns the status of the equipment tools, but not the quality of goods processed through these equipment tools. This is in direct contrast to the features/limitations recited in the pending claims as will be described later.

Turning now to the claims, the presently pending independent claims recite the following features/limitations:

> 1. A quality assurance system, comprising:
> a service provider having at least a first process stage, to perform a process on goods at the first process stage, transfer engineering data corresponding to the process, and ***hold the goods at the first process stage***; and
> a control center coupled to the service provider via Internet to receive the engineering data, compare the engineering data with a standard specification for confirming quality of the goods, and transfer a confirmation message to the service provider if the engineering data conforms to the standard specification,
> ***such that the service provider releases the goods for further operations after the confirmation message is received.***

(*Emphasis Added*).

> 6. A quality assurance method for use between a service provider and a control center, comprising the steps of:

performing of a process on goods at a first process stage by the service provider;

transferring of engineering data corresponding to the process to the control center via Internet, and ***holding of the goods at the first process stage by the service provider***;

comparing of the engineering data with a standard specification for confirming quality of the goods by the control center;

transferring of a confirmation message to the service provider via the Internet by the control center if the engineering data conforms to the standard specification; and

releasing of the goods for further operations by the service provider after the confirmation message is received.

(*Emphasis Added*).

11. A quality assurance system, comprising:

a service provider having a sequence of process stages and a quality assurance stage, to perform a plurality of processes on goods at the process stages, transfer engineering data corresponding to the processes, and ***hold the goods at the quality assurance***; and

a control center coupled to the service provider via Internet to receive the engineering data, compare the engineering data with a standard specification, and transfer a confirmation message to the service provider if the engineering data conforms to the standard specification,

such that the service provider ships the goods after the confirmation message is received.

(*Emphasis Added*).

16. A quality assurance method for use between a service provider and a control center, in which the service provider has a sequence of process stages and a quality assurance stage, comprising the steps of:

performing of a plurality of processes on goods at the process stages by the service provider;

transferring of engineering data corresponding to the processes to the control center via Internet, and ***holding of the goods at the quality assurance stage by the service provider***;

comparing of the engineering data with a standard specification by the control center;

transferring of a confirmation message to the service provider via the Internet by the control center if the engineering data conforms to the standard specification; and

shipping of the goods by the service provider after the confirmation message is received.

(*Emphasis Added*).

21. A quality assurance system, comprising:
a contractor having a sequence of process stages and a quality assurance stage, to perform a plurality of test processes on at least one wafer at the process stages, transfer engineering data corresponding to the processes, and ***hold the wafer at the quality assurance***; and
an IC (integrated circuit) foundry coupled to the service provider via Internet to receive the engineering data, compare the engineering data with a standard specification, and transfer a confirmation message to the contractor if the engineering data conforms to the standard specification,
such that the contractor ships the wafer after the confirmation message is received.

(*Emphasis Added*).

27. A quality assurance method for use between a contractor and an IC (integrated circuit) foundry, in which the contractor has a sequence of process stages and a quality assurance stage, comprising the steps of:
performing of a plurality of test processes on at least one wafer at the process stages by the contractor;
transferring of engineering data corresponding to the processes to the IC foundry via Internet, and ***holding of the wafer at the quality assurance stage by the contractor***;
comparing of the engineering data with a standard specification by the IC foundry;
transferring of a confirmation message to the contractor via the Internet by the IC foundry if the engineering data conforms to the standard specification; and
shipping of the wafer by the contractor after the confirmation message is received.

(*Emphasis Added*).

Since Takahashi, either individually or in combination with Hu, fails to teach or reasonably suggest at least the features/limitations emphasized above in the respective claims, Applicant respectfully asserts that the independent claims 1, 6, 11, 16, 21 and 27

are patentable over the cited references. Insofar as claims 2-5 directly or indirectly depend from claim 1, claims 7-10 directly or indirectly depend from claim 6, claims 12-15 directly or indirectly depend from claim 11, claims 17-20 directly or indirectly depend from claim 16, claims 22-26 directly or indirectly depend from claim 21, and claims 28-32 directly or indirectly depend from claim 27, Applicant respectfully asserts that these claims also are in condition for allowance.

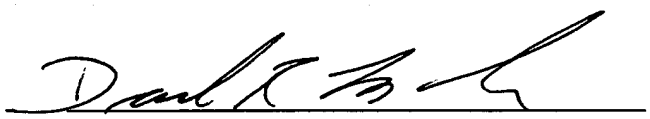
Cited Art Made of Record

The cited art made of record has been considered, but is not believed to affect the patentability of the presently pending claims.

CONCLUSION

In light of the foregoing amendments and for at least the reasons set forth above, Applicant respectfully submits that all objections and/or rejections have been traversed, rendered moot, and/or accommodated, and that the now pending claims 1 - 32 are in condition for allowance. Favorable reconsideration and allowance of the present application and all pending claims are hereby courteously requested. If, in the opinion of the Examiner, a telephonic conference would expedite the examination of this matter, the Examiner is invited to call the undersigned attorney at (770) 933-9500.

Respectfully submitted,



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